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(632) 552-9907

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INVESTING IN PEOPLE

(Education)

RP's worst public schools get attention of DepEd

By Jerry E. Esplanada

(Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer News Online – 3/25/08)

MANILA, Philippines -- The 1,898 lowest performing public elementary schools in the country will be given priority by the Department of Education in school-building, textbook and instructional material distribution, teacher training and school feeding, among other DepEd programs, Secretary Jesli A. Lapus said.

On President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's directive, Lapus said the DepEd “will also look at the other needs of these schools” that did poorly in the 2007 National Achievement Test (NAT) given to public elementary and secondary school students nationwide.

Among public high schools, 265 performed badly in the 2007 NAT, according to the DepEd. There are more than 43,000 public elementary and secondary schools nationwide.

“This year, DepEd will have priority focus on improving the ratings of the lowest performing schools,” Lapus told the Philippine Daily Inquirer, parent company of INQUIRER.net.

The schools, a number of which are found in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), will get first crack at the DepEd's teacher training program, particularly in English language proficiency.

The President had earlier directed the DepEd to come up with a “host of intervention measures” aimed at upgrading English instruction in the public schools, particularly those that registered a low mastery level in the 2007 NAT.

A school is considered to be in the low mastery level if its students' mean percentage score (MPS) is between 15 and 34 in the 100-item per subject test.

The NAT, which "measures what sixth grade and second-year high school students know, understand and can do," covers five subjects -- English, Mathematics, Science, Filipino and Hekasi, short for Heograpiya, Kasaysayan at Sibika, or the former Social Studies.

Of the 11 poorest performing grade schools, seven were in Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao and Sulu, all in ARMM. The school that registered the lowest MPS of 5.80 percent, Lumbac Elementary School, is in Lanao del Sur.

In the ARMM, "some of the probable reasons for the poor performance of schools include the unstable peace and order situation, poverty, inadequate pupil-teacher ratio and the limited learning resources in some of the schools," explained Director Nelia Benito of the DepEd's National Education Testing and Research Center.

The ARMM has the lowest academic achievement owing largely to the poor competencies of its public school teachers, according to a report by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The report said only 5 percent of ARMM teachers passed the Teachers' Licensure Exam compared to 31 percent of teachers in Luzon.

Last year, sixth grade pupils nationwide scored an average MPS of 60.78 in English, up from 54.05 percent in 2006.

High school students scored 51.81 percent in English, slightly higher than last year's 51.2 percent.

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